

Making Europe a smoke-free environment

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Opinion Plus

Maximilian Kunisch debunks claims made by a smokers' campaign that current European smoking and vaping regulation is "extreme" and "worrying".

A recent report by smokers campaign Forest EU paints a picture that is out of touch with the reality of EU legislation and the economic and societal effects of smoking in its many forms.

The campaign is funded, among others, by Japan Tobacco International, British American Tobacco and members of the European Smoking Tobacco Associations.

As a patient organisation representing people across Europe living with chronic respiratory diseases, namely asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), we at EFA see a strong need to comment and contextualise this thinly veiled manipulation of pseudo-science and semantics which does not bear resemblance to the facts.

Smoking is still the deadliest, preventable cause of premature death in the European Union, causing more than 700,000 deaths every year.

The current European smoking and vaping regulation cannot, as seen by Forest EU, be claimed as "extreme" or "worrying". It is most likely not extreme or worrying enough.

Blaming measures aligned with the 2009 Council recommendation on a smoke-free environment as "gold plating" is inappropriate.

"Smoking is still the deadliest, preventable cause of premature death in the European Union, causing more than 700,000 deaths every year"

[New evidence](#) [1] from asthma and COPD patients in Europe points out that, in fact, much more needs to be done by [European governments](#) [2] to prevent people living with chronic respiratory diseases from smoking and to abolish exposure to second-hand smoke (SHS).

In particular, from the patients' perspective, more action is needed on measures aimed at preventing smoking, as COPD is mostly caused by smoking and exposure to tobacco smoke.

Smoking cessation is one of the most effective ways to improve patients' quality of life and slow the progression of COPD.

Furthermore, [new European research results](#) [3] on outdoor SHS exposure are also alarming. In 2017, 344 children died due to exposure to second-hand smoke.

In particular, smoking in cars is a serious concern, where the nicotine concentration is 25 times higher than in a smoker's home.

Potential national regulations on smoking in cars are in-line with the Council recommendation to strengthen measures which reduce children's exposure to second-hand smoke, such as the new Swedish regulation which bans smoking in public places.

We encourage Forest EU to provide the scientific basis for [their claim](#) [4] that a two-meter distance from a smoker does not do harm to a bystander's respiratory health.

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In opposition to the view that smoking bans are an economic burden for society and employers, we consider [€25bn](#) [5] in annual tobacco-related costs and [€8bn](#) [6] in lost productivity a strong argument in favour of regulating tobacco use.

Indeed, we applaud countries who have set the eradication of smoking as a priority.

As early as 2009, [Eurobarometer research](#) [7]h showed that the kind of society most Europeans favour is a healthy one.

[Current research](#) [3] on European attitudes towards smoking bans reinforces this finding, highlighting that a majority of smokers is in favour of stricter smoking bans.

Together, with our more than 40 national member organisations in 25 European countries, [we ask policymakers](#) [8] to show leadership and to continue working to achieve a smoke-free environment.

That, and not backward, harmful thinking, is the picture we should be painting.

About the author

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- [1] <http://www.efanet.org/campaigns/showleadership/91-news/3761-efa-launches-new-european-report-active-patients-access-care>
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- [3] <http://www.efanet.org/resources/library/3766-efa-live-tackling-second-hand-smoke>
- [4] <http://forestonline.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Forest-EU-Smoking-in-Society-Infographics.pdf>
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